

HOUSE BILL 2239
By Winningham

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49,
Chapter 7, relative to rural development.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 7, is amended by adding a new part thereto, as follows:

Section 49-7-3101. The legislature hereby finds and declares that economic development is one of the missions of the institutions of higher education in this state. The University of Tennessee system plays an integral role in supporting agricultural industries, sustaining rural areas, and encouraging efficient use of resources through research and educational programs conducted by its experiment stations and extension service.

Section 49-7-3102.

(a) There is hereby created an initiative in the University of Tennessee at Martin, hereinafter referred to as the "center". The mission of the center shall be to improve socioeconomic well-being in Tennessee's rural communities by facilitating rural development research, increasing awareness and understanding of rural development conditions, issues, strategies, and policies in Tennessee, and providing rural community stakeholders and policymakers with information necessary for public policy decision-making.

(b) The center shall have the following powers, duties, and functions:

(1) Facilitate socioeconomic and rural development research and outreach by providing a platform for interdisciplinary and collaborative

scholarship and education and enhance the ability of the university of Tennessee system to capture external funding.

(2) Provide leadership in assessing and addressing the current status of socioeconomic development and underlying reasons for socioeconomic conditions within the state, with a particular emphasis on rural and persistent poverty areas.

(3) Evaluate the potential of various rural development policies and strategies and develop statewide and regional awareness of effective policies and strategies for rural development. Such strategies shall include rural entrepreneurship and value added development, rural workforce development, civic engagement and leadership, asset-based development, biotechnology, health care sector development, and natural resource based development.

(4) Provide educational outreach and assistance in implementing effective rural development strategies through such activities as conferences, workshops, and training sessions.

(5) Provide public services to communities and collect, analyze, interpret, and disseminate rural development information for Tennessee residents, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Methods of dissemination of rural development information shall include educational programming and print and electronic media.

(c) The center shall be housed at the University of Tennessee at Martin and shall be open to rural development professionals with an interest in rural development research and outreach. The core faculty shall consist of academic faculty within the University of Tennessee system. Affiliated partners may include

rural development or social science professionals from other universities, colleges, foundations, governments, or nongovernmental organizations. The center may operate other satellite rural development outreach centers deemed necessary.

(d) The center shall engage relevant stakeholders to facilitate rural development throughout the state and region, including universities, colleges, federal and state governments, national rural funders, and nongovernmental organizations. The center shall coordinate and build on existing relationships within the University of Tennessee system, the department of economic and community development, the Department of Agriculture, the United States department of agriculture, the Tennessee Forestry Association, the Southern Rural Development Center, the Rural Policy Research Institute, and the Foundation for the Mid South. The center shall develop new working relationships with other rural development partners.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.